

# SOCORRO FIELD OFFICE

Resource Management Plan Revision  
and Environmental Impact Statement



# SCOPING REPORT



**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
Bureau of Land Management  
Socorro Field Office

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**September 2002**

**Bureau of Land Management  
Socorro Field Office  
Resource Management Plan Revision and Environmental Impact Statement**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

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ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
ATV	All-terrain Vehicle
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon Dioxide
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EMT	Executive Management Team
FLPMA	Federal Land Policy and Management Act
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NOI	Notice of Intent
OHV	Off-highway Vehicle
RMP	Resource Management Plan
RMPR	Resource Management Plan Amendment
SMA	Special Management Area
TCP	Traditional Cultural Property
WSA	Wilderness Study Area

## SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

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### OVERVIEW

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Socorro Field Office, is preparing a Resource Management Plan Revision (RMPR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze and update BLM's management of public land in Socorro and Catron Counties, New Mexico ([Map 1](#)). The revision will update current management in response to new legislation, changing policies, and changing uses of public land and its resources.

In 1989, the BLM Socorro Field Office completed a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for public land in Socorro and Catron Counties, New Mexico. The purpose of the RMP was to provide a comprehensive framework for managing the public land and for allocating resources over a planning period of 15 to 20 years. The 1989 RMP set forth land use decisions and terms and conditions for guiding the management of activities on public land. Also, the RMP resulted in the development of activity plans for specific programs to provide goods and services to the American people.

During the 15- to-20-year life of an RMP, the plan is evaluated periodically to see if it remains adequate and continues to meet legislative and policy requirements, and land use and resource needs. If it does not meet the requirements and needs, the RMP is revised. The revision involves the preparation of a new RMP to replace the existing RMP.

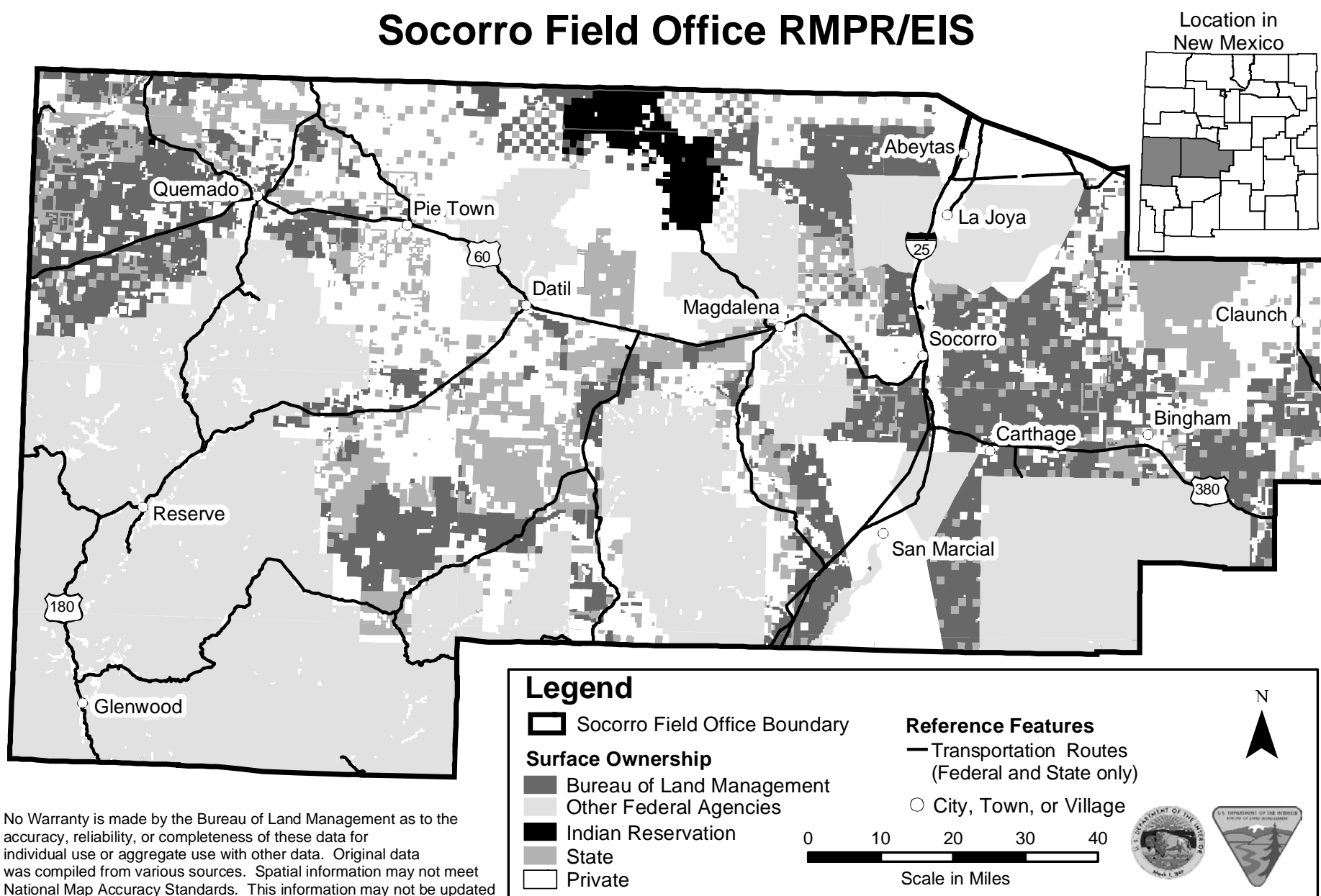
Since the Socorro RMP was implemented nearly 13 years ago, time and experience have demonstrated that many elements of the current Socorro RMP work well and it is BLM's intent to carry these elements forward. Much of the success is attributed to ongoing collaborative efforts with other Federal, State, county, and local agencies; Tribes; organizations; and individuals. However, BLM has determined that some of the existing management decisions are not current with changing circumstances, demographics, resource conditions, and/or policies. Population growth in the region has increased recreational uses of public land, and land acquisitions and disposals have created new areas for the public while closing others. Preserving and protecting certain areas while still allowing recreational use with updated Federal requirements is one important reason for revising the current RMP. In addition, changing emphasis on fire management, noxious weeds, increasing urbanization and consequent urban-rural interface, new subdivision development, oil and gas and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) development, off-highway vehicle use, and other resource programs necessitate revision of the RMP.

BLM is responsible for balanced management of public lands and resources considered in a combination that will serve the needs of the public most effectively. In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, management is based on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, an integration of uses that takes into account the long-term needs of present and future generations for renewable and nonrenewable resources.

BLM is developing the RMPR to be consistent with current laws and regulations, and provide the public an opportunity to review the decision-making for resource management on public lands in the two counties. The EIS studies will identify the potential impacts that implementation of the RMPR could have on the environment and identify appropriate measures to mitigate those impacts. The EIS will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA, FLPMA, and other relevant laws and regulations.

Integral to the planning and environmental process is the public participation program, which keeps relevant agencies and the interested public engaged in the project's progress. Opportunities for public

# Socorro Field Office RMPR/EIS



participation including scoping, public meetings, focus group discussions, updated mailings, and hearings will occur at key milestones throughout the process.

## **PLANNING AREA LOCATION**

The public land managed by the BLM Socorro Field Office is located in the west-central portion of New Mexico within Socorro and Catron Counties. Public land in the two counties includes approximately 1.5 million surface acres and 2.2 million acres of Federal minerals. Generally, public lands are well blocked in the Quemado, Pelona Mountain, Ladron, and Stallion areas. However, in large portions of the two counties, public land is isolated and scattered.

## **SCOPING PROCESS**

The first step in the RMPR/EIS process is “scoping,” the results of which are summarized in this report. Scoping is a process conducted early in a planning process that is open to agencies and the public to identify the range, or scope, of issues to be addressed during the planning and environmental studies for the RMPR/EIS. The lead agency responsible for the preparation of the document (in this case, BLM) solicits comments from relevant agencies and the public, organizes and analyzes all of the comments received, and then identifies the issues that will be addressed during the planning and environmental studies; that is, the scope of analysis for the RMPR/EIS. The duration of the scoping process is at least 30 days.

The remainder of this scoping report provides an explanation of the scoping activities and a summary of the comments received. In addition, several appendices provide supporting materials.

## **SCOPING ACTIVITIES**

BLM’s intent during the scoping process was to inform agencies and the public about the RMPR/EIS and solicit their comments in order to identify issues and questions to consider when developing the plan. During the scoping period, BLM announced the commencement of the RMPR/EIS through various means, invited written comments, and held public scoping meetings and some agency meetings. These activities are described below.

### **Announcements**

The RMPR/EIS and scoping meetings were announced through the *Federal Register*, a planning bulletin and scoping notice, newspaper advertisements, the New Mexico BLM Web site, and media releases.

### **Federal Register**

The RMPR/EIS and public scoping process began officially with the publication in the *Federal Register* of BLM’s [Notice of Intent](#) (NOI) to amend the RMP, prepare an EIS, and conduct public scoping meetings. The NOI was published on May 8, 2002.

## Planning Bulletin and Scoping Notice

In addition to the NOI, BLM prepared a planning bulletin and [scoping notice](#) to send to the entities on BLM's mailing list, which includes Federal, State, County, and local agencies; organizations; special-interest groups; and other interested parties. The scoping notice included a brief letter from the BLM Socorro Field Office Manager and a comment form. The notice provided brief history and background information, a description of agency environmental responsibilities, an explanation of the planning process, project schedule, agency responsibilities, preliminary planning criteria and resource concerns, and the types of decisions that might result.

The notice also announced upcoming public scoping meetings and other public participation opportunities. The comment form included with the scoping notice asked readers to submit comments related to the RMPR/EIS and indicate whether or not they were interested in receiving future project information. The planning bulletin and scoping notice was distributed to approximately 1,465 individuals, agencies, and interested organizations in early August 2002. The mailing list will be reviewed and updated throughout the RMPR/EIS process.

The planning bulletin and [scoping notice](#) was the first in a series of informational planning bulletins that will be distributed to the entities on the mailing list at key points of the process to keep them informed of progress.

## Paid Advertisements

BLM paid for advertisements to be published in local and regional newspapers. Paid advertisements were published as shown in Table 1.

<b>TABLE 1</b>	
<b>PAID ADVERTISEMENTS</b>	
<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Date Published</b>
The Albuquerque Journal	Monday, August 12, 2002
Magdalena Mountain Mail	Wednesday, August 14, 2002
El Defensor Chieftain	Wednesday, August 14, 2002
White Mountain Independent	Wednesday, August 14, 2002

## Media Release

A media release introducing the project and announcing the scoping meetings was prepared and issued on August 11, 2002 by BLM to local and regional newspapers, television, and radio as follows:

### Newspapers

- El Defensor Chieftain
- Sangre De Cristo Chronicle
- Rio Rancho Observer
- Silver City Daily Press
- The Gallup Independent
- Magdalena Mountain Mail
- Albuquerque Journal
- White Mountain Independent



- Valencia County News-Bulletin
- Shiwi Messenger

#### Television Stations

- KOAT – TV 7
- KRQE – News 13
- KOB – TV 4
- KASA – FOX 2
- KNME – Channel 5

#### Radio Stations

- KKOB 770 AM
- KTEG 104.7 FM
- KRST 92.3 FM
- KKOB 93.3 FM
- KKOR 94.5 FM
- KXXI 93.7 FM
- KYVA 103.7 FM
- KSVA 95.1 FM
- KZRR 94.1 FM
- KIOT 102.5 FM
- KISH 90.9 FM

#### **Telephone Information Line**

A toll-free telephone line was established in mid-August 2002 for the public to request information, ask questions, or be added to the mailing list. The telephone number for the information line is 1-866-702-3318. As of the date of this report, five messages have been received, all asking to be included on the mailing list to receive project information in the future.

#### **Web Site**

A web page was established to provide project information (linked from an existing web site at [www.nm.blm.gov](http://www.nm.blm.gov)). The planning bulletin and scoping notice were posted on the web site in mid-August 2002.

#### **Public Scoping Meetings**

Three public scoping meetings were conducted by BLM, as shown in Table 2.

<b>TABLE 2</b>	
<b>PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Meeting Location</b>
Tuesday, August 27, 2002	Socorro, New Mexico
Wednesday, August 28, 2002	Quemado, New Mexico
Thursday, August 29, 2002	Zuni, New Mexico

Several [displays](#) illustrating or explaining components of the RMPR/EIS were stationed around the meeting room for those in attendance to review. Representatives of BLM and URS (the consultant assisting BLM) were available to explain the displays and answer questions.

Each meeting began with a welcome address by the BLM Socorro Field Office Manager followed by a [presentation](#) by the BLM RMPR/EIS Team Leader. The presentation described the project background and agency missions, addressed the need for the RMPR/EIS, described the planning and EIS process, presented the project schedule, and discussed opportunities for public participation.

After the presentation, comments and questions were received from the public. To ensure a clear and accurate record, the comments and questions were recorded in writing as stated on a flipchart for the audience to view. Also, those in attendance at the meetings were given comment forms to complete and submit.

### **Agency Coordination**

As a part of scoping, a list of relevant Federal, State, County, and local agencies was compiled. A letter introducing the RMPR/EIS and upcoming data gathering was sent to each of the agencies on the list. BLM will continue to communicate with these agencies throughout the planning process.

Also, BLM began to meet with key Federal, State, and County agencies to initiate coordination and collaborative efforts that will continue throughout the planning and EIS process. At this early stage, initial meetings were conducted with the goal of introducing the RMPR/EIS process; gathering preliminary issues, ideas, and concerns; and discussing the role and responsibilities each agency will have in the process. As of the date of this report, meetings have been conducted with the following agencies:

#### **Federal**

- Bureau of Indian Affairs, Albuquerque Area Office
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge
- U.S. Forest Service, Gila National Forest
- U.S. Forest Service, Cibola National Forest
- Bureau of Reclamation, Socorro Field Office
- BLM New Mexico State Office and all Field Offices (through Executive Management Team [EMT] briefings)

#### **State**

- New Mexico Bureau of Mines and Mineral Resources
- New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
  - Mining and Minerals Division
  - Oil Conservation Division

- State Forestry Division
- New Mexico State Land Office

#### **County**

- Socorro County
- Catron County

Coordination meetings with additional agencies will continue following this scoping period.

#### **Cooperating Agencies/Invitees**

To date, BLM has invited the following organizations to participate in the process as cooperating agencies:

- Catron County
- Socorro County
- Zuni Tribe
- New Mexico State Land Office
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Ramah Navajo Band
- Navajo Nation

Of the agencies invited to date, Socorro and Catron Counties and the Zuni Tribe have agreed to serve as cooperating agencies. Other appropriate agencies and tribes may decide to join in the project in the future.

#### **Collaboration with Tribes**

The BLM Socorro Field Office has conducted approximately 50 Tribal consultations in the last five years, and Tribal collaboration for the RMPR/EIS is building on the relationships established through those earlier contacts. Bulletin 1 was sent to eight Tribes (Pueblo of Acoma, Pueblo of Isleta, Pueblo of Zuni, Hopi Tribe, Ysleta Del Sur, Navajo Nation, Alamo Chapter of the Navajo Nation, and Ramah Navajo Band).

The Pueblo of Zuni, Ramah Navajo Band, and Navajo Nation were specifically invited to serve as cooperating agencies. Pueblo of Zuni has Tribal Trust land surrounding Zuni Salt Lake within the planning area, and has agreed to be a cooperating agency. A meeting of cooperating agencies was held at Zuni on August 15, 2002, and a public scoping meeting was conducted at the Zuni Tribal Building on August 29, 2002.

The Alamo Chapter of the Navajo Nation also has Tribal Trust land within the planning area. An initial mailing was sent to the Chapter president to determine if the Chapter would like to participate as a cooperating agency; follow-up contacts with the Chapter are planned. Similar follow-up contacts will be made with officials of the Pueblo of Acoma, which has purchased ranch lands within the planning area and anticipates applying to have those lands designated as Tribal Trust land.

Tribal contacts will be expanded and consultations will continue. Tribes to be contacted with follow-up information include the Pueblos of Laguna and Isleta, Mescalero Apache Tribe, and Fort Sill Apache Tribe.

## SECTION 2 – ISSUE SUMMARY

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### INTRODUCTION

The scoping period commenced with the publication of the [NOI](#) in the *Federal Register* on May 8, 2002 and ended on September 13, 2002. However, comments were accepted for inclusion in this Scoping Report until September 20, 2002. Comments were submitted to BLM in writing on comment forms and in letters, and oral comments were recorded from the public scoping meetings and initial agency coordination meetings. BLM will continue to consider public comments throughout the RMPR/EIS process.

A total of 214 letters and comment forms were received by BLM. A total of 49 people attended the three scoping meetings. Table 3 below is a summary of the meeting attendance and number of oral comments.

<b>TABLE 3 PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING ATTENDANCE AND COMMENTS</b>			
<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Meeting Location</b>	<b>Number in Attendance</b>	<b>Number of Oral Comments Received at Meetings</b>
Tuesday, August 27, 2002	Socorro, New Mexico	25	22
Wednesday, August 28, 2002	Quemado, New Mexico	16	28
Thursday, August 29, 2002	Zuni, New Mexico	8	26
Total		49	76

All of the comments and questions were compiled, reviewed, and analyzed to identify the preliminary issues that will be addressed in the RMPR/EIS. The remainder of this section summarizes the comments received.

### SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The comments received to date primarily address the RMPR/EIS process and schedule, agency coordination, land use and access, special management areas, water resources, vegetation, wildlife, special status areas, rangeland/livestock grazing, cultural resources, recreation, OHV use, social and economic impacts, hazardous materials, and fire management. The comments received are listed by category in Table 4 at the end of this report and summarized below.

### RMPR/EIS Process

Although the scoping period commenced with the publication of the [NOI](#) on May 8, 2002, other scoping activities did not begin until August 2002 when a consulting firm was contracted to assist BLM with the RMPR/EIS process. The planning bulletin and scoping notice, media release, and paid advertisement were distributed in mid-August. The web site and telephone information line also were implemented in mid-August. The scoping meetings were held during the last week of August. Concern was expressed by the public that the time remaining before the close of scoping on September 13, 2002 would not be sufficient to meet with or contact all affected parties (agencies and public) to adequately identify all of the

issues that need to be addressed in the RMPR/EIS process. The commenters urged BLM to make a concerted effort to receive more input from the public. Also, concern was expressed about reaching interested and affected public in communities where no meetings were scheduled. Another commenter questioned how much weight and impact comments from national special interest groups would have versus comments from local people who live near and use the public land more regularly.

In response to BLM's commitment to implement a community-based collaborative process integral with the RMPR/EIS process, the public supported the commitment and encouraged BLM to establish relationships with relevant affected and/or interested agencies. It was noted that partnerships between agencies should be created to provide management prescriptions and project implementation across boundaries.

Several suggestions were offered as ways to reach more individuals including placing all informational materials in local post offices and libraries and having a booth with informational materials at the upcoming Socorro County Fair. All of these means of public outreach were implemented in immediate response to the suggestion.

The Otero County Commissioners requested the proposed RMPR not proceed until similar plan revisions are undertaken in other areas impacted by the Socorro RMPR. According to the Otero County Commissioners, any such revision would be illegal and unenforceable until such time as plan revisions in the impacted area outside of Socorro and Catron Counties also are considered and correspondingly revised.

### **Lands and Access**

Several concerns were expressed about access. Commenters asked for clarification about the definition of a road, criteria used for determining whether a road is closed or open for use, and BLM's ability to maintain roads. While some commenters want more access into and on public land for recreation or to get to private property, others want less access into and on public land to reduce the number of recreationists (including hunters) and consequent impacts. It was suggested that the public should have access to all public land and private landowners should not block access to public land. Concern was expressed about the creation of new roads by recreationists, particularly those created in Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs).

It was suggested that BLM should conduct a comprehensive inventory of roads to identify which roads should be closed, which should be open, and that "illegal" roads or roads no longer used should be closed. It also was suggested that BLM should enforce a policy that all roads are closed unless posted as open. To remedy the problem of overuse and/or illegal use of public land, commenters made suggestions that BLM designate areas where people can go to recreate and hunt, require permits or registration for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, and/or post numerous signs to indicate whether roads are open or closed. Concern also was expressed regarding the BLM's lack of resources available to enforce restrictions. Additional concern was expressed regarding the potential for road closures by BLM in areas where people use roads to access private property (i.e., rights-of-way established prior to implementation of FLPMA).

Public land exchange was discussed. Both the benefits and consequences of this practice received comments. Comments opposed to public land exchange stated it can jeopardize wildlife habitats and migratory corridors, and that public land belongs to the taxpayers and should not be traded away. Others expressed opinions in favor of land exchange, and called for flexibility in the retention and disposal areas.

## **Resource Concerns**

Public comments on the resources to be addressed in the RMPR/EIS focused on protection of resources. Several concerns were expressed about potential adverse effects of livestock grazing including adverse effects on vegetation, watersheds, and stream banks. Several commenters noted that restrictions should be placed on the amount of cattle allowed on public land, and that monitoring efforts should be improved. One commenter suggested that livestock grazing should be used for vegetative management instead of using chemicals or fire for that purpose.

Wildlife was discussed in terms of the desire to maintain viable native populations and habitat (with emphasis on big game species, according to the commenter). BLM was asked whether it favors elk, deer, or antelope in certain areas and noted that elk populations in some areas are high and in need of control. It was suggested that BLM collaborate with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to conduct elk hunts in the same manner as antelope hunts.

One commenter noted that wolves on U.S. Forest Service land have an impact on adjacent land, and one commenter was in favor of the desert sheep restoration program.

Two commenters were concerned about contaminants from power plants (i.e., bioaccumulation of arsenic in deer, and mercury in fish).

## **Special Management Areas**

Comments regarding Special Management Areas (SMAs) included encouraging BLM to consider creating new SMAs, WSAs, and/or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) to protect sensitive and/or unique resources, be thoughtful in planning for management of areas where increased use is inevitable, provide adequate protection of biological resources in areas already designated as ACECs and SMAs, and protect special areas from potential impacts of actions on adjacent lands not managed by BLM. Two areas specifically mentioned for special status consideration were the Quebradas area and San Lorenzo Canyon.

Attendees at the scoping meeting in Zuni were interested in understanding the criteria used and scope of study for SMAs, and the potential for changing the SMA in the area of the Zuni Salt Lake to an ACEC as part of the RMPR/EIS. Also, the comment was made that the sanctuary area surrounding the Zuni Salt Lake should be designated as an ACEC. It was suggested that stipulations to allow for grazing, fewer roads, and protection and stabilization of cultural resource areas should be considered.

One commenter asked if SMAs are just cultural areas, and another asked that cultural SMAs be given back to the native people, saving tax money spent on maintenance.

## **Special Designation Nominations**

The Zuni Salt Lake Sanctuary Site was recommended by the Pueblo of Zuni for designation as an ACEC. No other specific nominations were received among the comments for designations of SMAs, ACECs, or WSAs. However, a number of comments recommended pursuing this process through the upcoming analysis process.

## **Cultural Resources**

Traditional cultural properties (TCPs) were discussed at length at the scoping meeting in Zuni. Concerns expressed were whether they would be addressed differently in the RMPP compared to the existing 1989 RMP, and whether they could be protected or have restricted use. BLM was asked how small TCPs could be protected and managed while allowing use (e.g., gathering areas).

Other concerns discussed were related to the Fence Lake coal mine and the issues that relate to Zuni Salt Lake, Ramah Navajo, Acoma Pueblo, and Laguna Pueblo Tribes.

One commenter stated that BLM needs to ensure protection of fossils and other paleontological discoveries.

## **Social and Economic Conditions**

It is recognized that Socorro and Catron Counties are deprived economically. No major transportation routes pass through Catron County, nor are there sufficiently large industries in either county to substantially support the economy. A few comments related to ways in which the RMPP could assist in promoting economic opportunities. Several voiced support for the Fence Lake coal mine, in Catron County, and stated it will provide employment and other revenue. Comments suggested expanding the current practice of BLM offering contracts to local enterprises to assist with tasks related to fire management, such as clearing areas and removing fuel materials and/or debris.

Concerns were expressed regarding increased land use in the planning area due to increased population, but primarily in areas outside of the planning area (e.g., Albuquerque and Las Cruces/El Paso). While increased revenues from purchases of goods and services assist the local communities, increased use places greater burden on and cost to the local communities, counties, and land-managing agencies and greater pressure (effects) on the land and its resources. The opinion was stated that this increased use is accompanied by a degree of disregard for the land and local residents as evidenced by off-road travel and trash.

## **Fire Management**

The new National Fire Policy and changes in land use (e.g., property subdivisions) are prompting BLM to review current management direction for fire management. Sensitized by current drought conditions and recent major fires in the region, comments concerning fuel treatment and prescribed burns were raised. Some discussion and questions related to appropriate treatment of materials accumulated from areas cleared of excess fuels. Should accumulated materials be destroyed by burning, discretionarily left in areas to provide habitat suitable for wildlife, removed, or a combination of these? Other comments expressed concern and sensitivity about fuel treatment adjacent to private development. Representatives of the Pueblo of Zuni asked that BLM and the Zuni continue to work together on prescribed burn practices.

## **Recreation**

OHV use was an issue raised at all three meetings. Many comments were documented relating to permitting or some other means of restricting OHV use.



Comments opposed to OHV use stated that restrictions should be imposed in the RMPR. Specifically, comments noted that OHVs destroy vegetation; pollute the air, soil, and water; create deep erosion scars; destroy the solitude and quiet of the public lands; harass wildlife and other animals; generate increased dust; promote destructive attitudes; and damage recreational resources. Several commenters noted that OHV use should be restricted to existing roadways, or a policy of “closed unless posted as open” should be adopted. One commenter suggested OHV use should be restricted to specific, limited, intensive-use areas. Comments in favor of OHV use suggested maintaining current access to all public areas. Other suggestions were to establish trails exclusively for OHV use to eliminate conflict with other recreation uses while still maintaining access to public lands for everyone.

Hunting issues were also received in the written comments. The lack of game in the area is a concern. Many local residents feel this is due to commercial hunters and trappers being allowed to hunt along with the public. They feel that, not only does hunting by outfitters clear out the game, but trash and other debris are left behind. One commenter felt that hunting by outfitters should not be allowed. Reducing or restricting the number of hunting licenses also was suggested as well as protection for private property owners from hunters who cut fences, drive over grazing lands, and leave trash.

Several comments concerning the Continental Divide Trail also were received. Because a portion of the Continental Divide Trail follows a state highway, BLM was asked to consider moving the trail to a more primitive road with access to the Cibola Wilderness. Conflicts with motorized vehicles was expressed as a concern. One commenter noted that the Continental Divide Trail should be identified as a separate management area.

Other comments asked for consideration for separate trails for hiking and horseback riding, and mountain biking and OHVs. BLM was asked to plan for mountain biking because there has been a substantial increase in the use of mountain bikes.

### **Geology and Minerals**

Comments were received about geology, minerals, and mining, including several comments about CO<sub>2</sub> discoveries in the area, which were focused primarily in the status of the discoveries, and investigation of the resource potential and development of these resources. Commenters were curious about how recent the CO<sub>2</sub> discoveries are, their status, and whether or not an EIS had been completed addressing this issue. One commenter noted that the existing RMP does not discuss CO<sub>2</sub> and helium discoveries. BLM was asked to include in the RMPR an evaluation of CO<sub>2</sub> and helium potential and foreseeable development in Socorro and Catron Counties. It also was suggested that BLM provide management direction for industry plans for development of CO<sub>2</sub> and helium resources. One commenter felt that there should be a greater focus on the extraction of helium from CO<sub>2</sub> wells. Concern also was raised that correlative helium rights on public land may be drained by the production of fee land in Arizona. It was asked what effect development of the CO<sub>2</sub> resource would have on Zuni Salt Lake.

Other comments regarding these resources were related to the use of oil and gas and saleable mineral resources. One commenter asked BLM to examine the possibility of increasing exploration and leasing for oil and gas in frontier areas, and another suggested that BLM consider more activity for saleable minerals and the possibility of permitting these extractive sites. One commenter asked that geological maps, oil and gas maps, and mineral potential maps be available in digital format.

A commenter suggested that BLM address mine abandonment, designation, procedures, and expediting the process for closure of mines.

## ANTICIPATED ISSUES

Public, Tribal, and agency comments have elaborated on and added to the potential issues identified in the BLM's pre-plan. As analyses and the collaborative process continues, it is anticipated that some of the issues may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- What areas will be open, closed, or designated as limited to motorized access?
- What are the desired levels of resource production or the conditions of those resources?
- What are the allowable levels of resource use?
- How can fire and fuels management, range management, wildlife habitat management, and other disciplines of multiple-use be best combined for improvements at the watershed level?
- How should OHV use be managed?
- What are the effects of urban interface on public land resources and management practices?
- What types of constraints should be placed on resource uses?
- Do existing retention and disposal areas for land tenure adjustments reflect current knowledge of resource values?
- Should SMAs and ACECs be added, dropped, or management plans revised?
- What resource and wilderness values are located on recently acquired public land, and what multiple use decisions are needed for effective management?
- How will fluid and solid minerals development be managed given changes since the 1989 RMP?
- How will development of the CO<sub>2</sub> resource affect other resources, in particular, Zuni Salt Lake?
- How can the public best benefit from the BLM's cultural and recreational initiatives (such as Ft. Craig, El Camino Real International Heritage Center, etc.)?
- How can the BLM and the public lands contribute to sustainable reduction of the extreme poverty levels of the two counties?
- Should additional lands with wilderness values be considered for WSA designation?

**TABLE 4**  
**CONSOLIDATED COMMENTS AND ISSUES FROM SCOPING**  
**(items may reflect more than one comment on the same topic)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Comments</b>
RMPPR/EIS Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerned that individuals in affected communities where no meetings were held will not have the opportunity to comment in such a short time (by September 13).</li> <li>• What else can be done to receive more input from the public? All issues may not be identified by September 30.</li> <li>• Concerned that such a short time (only two weeks) has been allotted for identifying issues. Will comments be considered after that time?</li> <li>• A copy of the existing RMP should be placed in the libraries in Socorro, Datil, Reserve, and New Mexico Technical Institute for better access to the public.</li> <li>• How can social and economic impacts be considered, and at the same time treat “affected parties” the same as “interested parties”?</li> <li>• What are the general guidelines of BLM’s management capabilities? What should the public expect based on the guidelines?</li> <li>• It is important to include State, Tribal, and local governments in the preparation of an EIS.</li> <li>• Will a partnership be developed with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to participate in the process?</li> <li>• Otero County Commissioners request the proposed RMPPR not proceed until similar plan revisions are undertaken in the areas impacted by the Socorro RMPPR. Any such revision will be illegal and unenforceable until such time as plan revisions in the impacted area outside of Socorro and Catron Counties also are considered and correspondingly revised.</li> <li>• Otero County Commission has not been invited or notified or, at a minimum, allowed the option to be Joint Lead Agency or Cooperating Agency with respect to any and all matters that may impact Otero County.</li> <li>• BLM must comply with the “Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996” and environmental justice.</li> <li>• Partnerships should be created to provide management prescriptions and project implementation across boundaries.</li> </ul>
Lands and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a remedy for overuse and/or illegal use, can BLM require permits or registration for OHV use?</li> <li>• Designate certain areas where people can go (i.e., hunting, camping).</li> <li>• What do you mean by a maintained road?</li> <li>• What can be done to eliminate the public from creating new roads in WSAs?</li> <li>• Federal signage, which seems to have more authority than privately posted signage, needs to be created and posted in the open and closed areas. The more signs the better.</li> <li>• Identify illegal roads or roads no longer used and close them to preclude additional use.</li> <li>• What are the criteria for open and closed roads?</li> <li>• Will changes to the RMP adversely affect access to lands or existing roads?</li> <li>• Is there a restriction on BLM’s ability to maintain existing roads or ways? (“Roads” are maintained; “ways” are not maintained).</li> <li>• What is the definition of an existing road?</li> <li>• Conduct a comprehensive inventory of roads. Enforce “closed unless posted” as open policy towards OHV travel.</li> <li>• Need more roads through the area. Bought land 30 years ago and never have been able to access it.</li> <li>• Continue to facilitate land exchanges. BLM should continue to look for additional ways to facilitate private/public and state/public</li> </ul>

**TABLE 4**  
**CONSOLIDATED COMMENTS AND ISSUES FROM SCOPING**  
**(items may reflect more than one comment on the same topic)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Lands and Access (continued)	<p>land trades.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't give away more of our public land. Doesn't it belong to the taxpayers?</li> <li>• Provide adequate access to private land inholdings at reasonable cost.</li> <li>• Provide public access to all public land; eliminate private landowners from blocking access to public land. If private landowners block or do not provide access to BLM land, all grazing rights should be revoked.</li> <li>• Maintain vehicle and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) access to public land.</li> <li>• There should be more flexibility in the retention and disposal areas.</li> </ul>
Special Management Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider creating or including new Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Additions should be included under the Wilderness Act of 1964.</li> <li>• What is the scope of study for WSAs?</li> <li>• Will the SMA for the Zuni Salt Lake be changed to an ACEC during this process?</li> <li>• BLM needs to provide for adequate protection of biological resources in areas designated as ACECs and SMAs.</li> <li>• Is it possible for the sanctuary area surrounding Zuni Salt Lake to be designated as an ACEC with some stipulations (e.g. grazing, fewer roads, and protection and stabilization of cultural resource areas)?</li> <li>• BLM should provide special status for Quebradas wild lands. BLM must stay apprised of and be ready to react to potential threats to the Quebradas region from the military expansion of White Sands into its so-called "FIX" area.</li> <li>• BLM should give special consideration for San Lorenzo Canyon. San Lorenzo Canyon is a very accessible gem with outstanding scenic and recreation values. BLM should be thoughtful in planning for the inevitable increased use of this area.</li> </ul>
Cultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will traditional cultural properties (TCPs) be addressed differently in the RMPR compared to the existing RMP?</li> <li>• Can TCPs be protected or have use restricted? If there are small TCPs that need protection, how can they be managed to protect them and still use them (e.g., as gathering areas)?</li> <li>• Are SMAs just cultural areas?</li> <li>• Why not give the cultural SMAs back to the native people and avoid use of taxpayers money for maintenance?</li> <li>• Need to ensure protection of fossils and other paleontological discoveries, especially pertaining to vertebrate fossils.</li> <li>• Concerned about the effects on Zuni Salt Lake from activities conducted or proposed in the area.</li> <li>• What effect will CO<sub>2</sub> development have on Zuni Salt Lake?</li> <li>• How will new information about cultural resources (and effective cultural resource management) be incorporated into the RMPR?</li> <li>• Do the 1989 gas and oil lease stipulations reflect current cultural resources knowledge?</li> <li>• Do stipulations for coal and other mineral extraction (e.g., CO<sub>2</sub> extraction) reflect current cultural resources knowledge?</li> <li>• Does the leasing process account for the compliance needs under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act at appropriate points in the process?</li> <li>• How is the leasing process taking into account clarification/redefinition of cultural properties regarding the Zuni Salt Lake?</li> <li>• How are impacts on cultural landscapes and TCPs addressed during the leasing process? Are the stipulations developed to protect</li> </ul>

**TABLE 4**  
**CONSOLIDATED COMMENTS AND ISSUES FROM SCOPING**  
**(items may reflect more than one comment on the same topic)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Cultural Resources (continued)	<p>these entities as appropriate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are resources appropriately protected as new development is occurring?</li> <li>• How is consultation with interested parties (such as Tribal governments) incorporated into the planning process?</li> <li>• Does planning for current SMAs and ACECs reflect current cultural resources knowledge?</li> <li>• How will the RMPR address changing land use patterns and suburban developments that may affect cultural resources on public (BLM) lands?</li> <li>• Language should be incorporated into the RMPR to facilitate appropriate strategies for identification and evaluation of cultural resources, in terms of both the Section 110 and 106 responsibilities for the agency under the National Historic Preservation Act, rather than deferring such decisions until an undertaking has been proposed in a particular area.</li> </ul>
Vegetation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead of chemicals or fire (let burn) for vegetation management, use livestock grazing as much as possible.</li> <li>• Concerned that unfenced private land not be overgrazed.</li> <li>• Restrict the amount of cattle grazing on public land.</li> <li>• Provide for adequate wildlife habitat with emphasis on big game species (e.g., elk, deer).</li> </ul>
Wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will the BLM favor elk, deer, or antelope in certain areas in the RMPR? The elk population in the area is high (e.g., on the Zuni Reservation) and needs to be controlled.</li> <li>• Wolves on land managed by the U.S. Forest Service have an impact on adjacent public land.</li> <li>• The elk are eating forage and using water that has been allocated for grazing uses.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to conduct elk hunts like the antelope hunts.</li> <li>• In favor of the desert sheep restoration program.</li> <li>• Develop food plots for game animals.</li> <li>• Need to maintain a viable population of all native species and reduce and eliminate exotic species.</li> <li>• Concerned about bioaccumulation of arsenic from power plant emissions in deer.</li> <li>• Concerned about contamination of fish (potential contamination by mercury from power plants).</li> </ul>
Water Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can groundwater pumping and geophysical exploration be restricted or buffered? Groundwater use also should be controlled.</li> <li>• Address access to water and improvement of natural water resources.</li> </ul>
Social and Economic Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support received for Fence Lake Mine as it will be good for the local economy.</li> <li>• There is a need for County involvement in economic development workshops.</li> <li>• Are there plans to enhance the local economy by using local workforce or enhance small businesses in the area?</li> </ul>
Fire Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce fuels that may be hazardous. Whenever possible allow natural fires to burn.</li> <li>• BLM needs to plan for the disposal of the fuels collected, whether being prescribing burns to eliminate it or leave it in certain areas (to perhaps create habitat).</li> <li>• Regarding fire management (e.g., prescribed burns), how can the Zuni work together with BLM on public land?</li> <li>• New information and fire management planning procedures should be considered in the RMPR process.</li> </ul>

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<b>Subject</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Livestock Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does BLM ever tell people to remove cattle from public land? Why is the land to the north of Magdalena destroyed but there are still cattle on it?</li> <li>• Restrict the amount of cattle grazing on public land.</li> <li>• Do not allow grazing in stream banks.</li> <li>• Improve monitoring efforts of the grazing program.</li> <li>• Concerned about cumulative effects of the range and cattle grazing program on watersheds.</li> </ul>
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider a category of trails for hiking or horseback riding only, mountain bikes, and OHVs.</li> <li>• Plan for mountain biking. There has been a substantial increase in the use of mountain bikes.</li> <li>• The segment of the Continental Divide Trail north of Pie Town follows an undesirable path of state highway. Please consider establishing County Road A83 as the Continental Divide Trail. This is a shorter route on a more primitive road and accesses public land in the Cibola Wilderness.</li> <li>• Relocate the Continental Divide Trail to reduce conflict with motorized vehicles.</li> <li>• The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail should be identified as a separate management area.</li> <li>• Control OHV abuse. The accelerating abuse of public and frequently adjoining lands from unmanaged OHVs should be the number one issue in the new RMP. OHVs destroy vegetation; pollute the air, soil, and water; create deep erosion scars; destroy the solitude and quiet of the public land; harass wildlife and other animals; generate increased dust; promote destructive attitudes; and damage recreational resources.</li> <li>• The natural values of the area should be protected. OHV use must be restricted under a “closed unless open” policy, especially in areas identified by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.</li> <li>• Use of ATVs on public land should be restricted or allowed only on existing roadways and not tracks created by ATVs in the past few years.</li> <li>• ATV destruction of public land must be stopped. BLM would never allow such destruction by other means such as overgrazing. Why the exception for ATVs?</li> <li>• OHV use and abuse is damaging to the landscape and ecosystem.</li> <li>• Would like to see OHV use restricted to specific, limited, intense-use areas with strict enforcement.</li> <li>• BLM should not permit hunting for outfitters.</li> <li>• There was a noticeable lack of game in the area last year. Commercial hunting guides and commercial trappers are leaving a lot of trash as well as clearing out the game. There are very few tracks in area now, as compared to three years ago. The area needs time to recover. There is ample water and a good supply of grass, but not much game.</li> <li>• The number of hunters allowed on Federal lands needs to be reduced. Too many hunters create pressure on the land and resources.</li> <li>• Private property owners need protection from hunters who cut fences, drive over their grazing lands, and leave trash.</li> </ul>
Geology, Minerals, and Mining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How current are the CO<sub>2</sub> discoveries; what is their current status? Has an EIS been completed?</li> <li>• Include in the RMPR evaluation of CO<sub>2</sub> and helium potential and the foreseeable development in Catron and Socorro Counties.</li> </ul>

**TABLE 4**  
**CONSOLIDATED COMMENTS AND ISSUES FROM SCOPING**  
**(items may reflect more than one comment on the same topic)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Geology, Minerals, and Mining (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be a greater focus on the extraction of helium from the CO<sub>2</sub> wells.</li> <li>• BLM needs to provide management direction to industry plans for development of CO<sub>2</sub> and helium resources.</li> <li>• Examine the possibility of increasing exploration and leasing for oil and gas in frontier areas.</li> <li>• Have geological maps, oil and gas maps, and mineral potential map in digital format (i.e., geographic information system [GIS]).</li> <li>• The existing RMP does not discuss the current discoveries of CO<sub>2</sub> and helium.</li> <li>• Correlative helium rights on public land [i.e., Federal mineral estate] may be drained by the production from fee land in Arizona.</li> <li>• Suggest addressing mine abandonment, designation, procedures, and expediting the process for closure of the mines.</li> <li>• Consider the possibility of more activity for saleable minerals (e.g., sand and gravel) and the possibility of permitting these extractive sites.</li> </ul>
Air Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plumes from power plant in area affect both humans and wildlife. This needs to be addressed in the RMPR.</li> </ul>

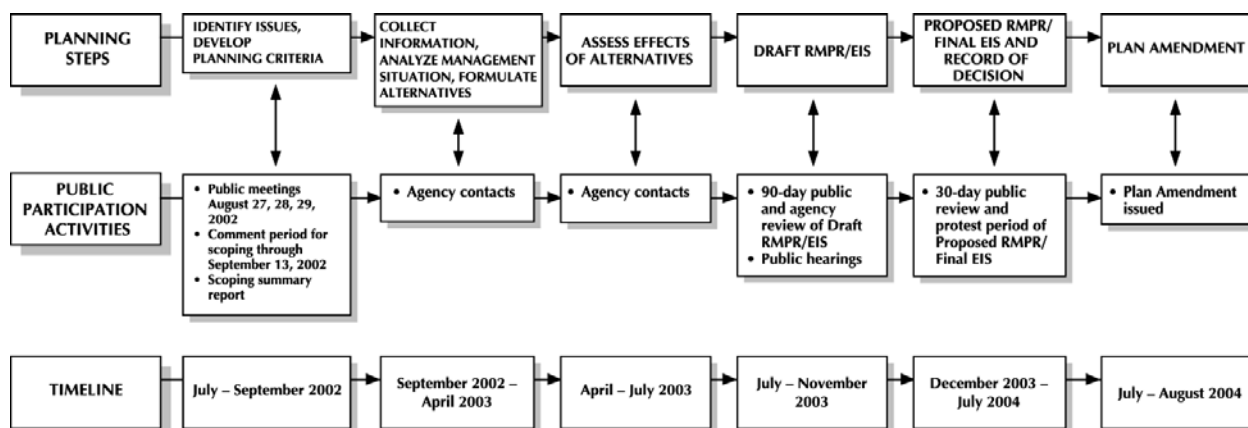
## SECTION 3 – SUMMARY OF FUTURE STEPS

### INTRODUCTION

The RMPR/EIS process, which is scheduled for completion in approximately 24 months, consists of the following nine basic steps:

- (1) identification of issues
- (2) development of planning criteria
- (3) inventory data and information collection
- (4) management situation analysis
- (5) formulation of alternatives
- (6) estimation of effects of the alternatives
- (7) selection of the preferred alternative
- (8) selection of the plan amendment
- (9) monitoring and evaluation

The steps of the planning process are shown in the flow chart below. BLM is working to complete Steps 1 and 2 above and will begin Step 3 in October 2002.



The comments and issues identified through scoping and subsequent discussions will assist in determining the scope of the studies to be completed and addressed in the RMPR/EIS. The study team will compile a resource inventory for the planning area that reflects the existing condition of the human, natural, and cultural environment. Integrating and using the issues identified, inventory of resource data, and existing management direction, the team will conduct an analysis to identify (1) areas of limited or restricted uses, (2) levels of resource production, (3) allowable resource uses, (4) resource condition objectives, (5) program constraints, and (6) general management direction. A range of reasonable alternatives, including an alternative considering no action, as required by NEPA, will be developed and analyzed in the EIS. Potential impacts of the alternatives will be assessed and the results of the analyses will be documented in a Draft RMPR/EIS, which the public will be asked to review. Comments on the Draft RMPR/EIS received from agencies and the public will be considered and incorporated into the Proposed RMPR/Final EIS. After a Governor's Consistency Review and public protest period, BLM will issue a Record of Decision and an approved RMPR. BLM will continue to consider public comments throughout the RMPR/EIS process.



## **RESOURCES TO BE ADDRESSED**

Resources that will be addressed in the RMPR/EIS include the following:

### **Human/Social Environment**

- Lands and realty
- Recreation
- Visual characteristics
- Local and regional social and economic conditions
- Native American issues and concerns
- Livestock grazing
- Fire management
- Hazardous substances management

### **Cultural Environment**

- Historic and archaeological resources
- Paleontological resources
- Living traditional cultures

### **Natural Environment**

- Geology and minerals
- Soils
- Water resources
- Air quality
- Vegetation management
- Wildlife
- Special-status species
- Noxious weeds
- Wild horses
- Wilderness

## **PLANNING CRITERIA**

The criteria guiding the development of the RMPR/EIS will include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Recognize valid existing rights.
- Follow existing laws, regulations, executive orders, and BLM policy and program guidance.
- Collaborate with agencies and the public.
- Consider adjoining non-public land when making management decisions to minimize land use conflicts. Consider planning jurisdictions of other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian Tribes.

- Develop alternative management descriptions that are reasonable and avoid analysis solely based on maximum and minimum output, uses, and activities.
- Use current scientific information, research, new technologies, and the results of inventory, monitoring, and coordination when determining appropriate management strategies.
- Address local and regional social and economic conditions and environmental justice.
- Determine which decisions and analyses in the existing RMP are valid and should be carried forward in the RMPR.
- Provide for public safety and welfare.
- Address effects on the natural, human, and cultural environments.